

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0026.02 : Tape 2**

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Interviewed by: Paljor Tsarong
Name: Gyedong Tsering [Tib. rgyas stong tshe ring]
Gender: Male
Age: ca. 80
Date of Birth: ca. 1913

Abstract

(Amdo) Gyedong Tsering [Tib. rgyas stong tshe ring] was a trader who was originally from Amdo. He was involved in the 2nd People's Association and with Jenkhentsisum in India. In this interview, he discusses the 1950's in Lhasa and Kalimpong. He also discusses Jenkhentsisum's correspondence and Phala's role in this and his own responsibilities taking letters to Kalimpong for Jenkhentsisum while trading. Additionally, he talks about Alo Chöndze.

Tape 2

Q: You, Bisu, and the Triu Khamba went down to Dartsedo with Alo Chöndze, right?

A: There was also a monk from Shelkar.

Q: When you say a Shelkar monk are you talking about Shelkar Chandzö?

A: No. This was just a monk from Shelkar [Monastery].

Q: And who else.

A: From our People's Association that's about it. Then there were 3 abbots from the three great monasteries. Then from among the aristocratic officials, there was the Shatra Sey.

Q: In the first one [1st welcoming delegation]?

A: Yes.

Q: So how were the representatives for this chosen.

A: We met in the Songra [Tib. zong ra] House [Alo Chöndze's house that was located on the north side of the Barkor Street]. At that time, there were a lot of people there since this was not against the Chinese. We were meeting to discuss the reception of the Dalai Lama and so we were very happy to gather. There were 70-80 people and we said that we have to form a reception group for the Dalai Lama and so there was a lot of talk and they asked me to go as one representative. At that time, I was just about to go to India for trading. The elders were saying that I should stay, so I agreed to stay. I was the first one chosen. Then they told Alo Chöndze to go. So Alo Chöndze and I agreed to go. Bisu and others came from Shigatse. The ones from Shelkar were also decided by themselves. So we said we need to have people from Ütsang, Amdo and Khamba. The Triu Khamba was not with us. He was at Targye [Tib. dar rgyas] Monastery and he came along to Dartsedo (on his own to meet them there).

Q: So you decided to choose people by regions?

A: We did it according to the 3 chokha or macro-regions [Tib. chol kha], i.e., Kham, Amdo and Ütsang. Alo Chöndze was from Ütsang, I was Amdo and then we needed a khamba and that's how we decided.

Q: Shatra and those people were together with you, right?.

A: Yes, we were together.

Q: He was sent from the government side, right?

A: There was also a Kalön Lama from the government. What's his name- he stayed at Shöl. From the government side, there was one kalön and Shatra, and there were the 3 abbots from the three great monasteries. Along with servants, all together there were about 15-16 people.

Q: I see. So this was for the welcome reception of the Dalai Lama when he was returning [from China].

A: Yes, for the first welcome reception group.

Q: You mentioned a monastery in Tau called Nyitso.

A: Tau Nyitso.

Q: Nyitso?

A: Yes.

Q: Regarding the documents, a letter was received saying that they [Jenkhentsisum] needed certain documents and certain people's representatives. So this letter was sent from Kalimpong?

A: The letter was from Jenkhentsisum. They were making connections with Phala. They told Phala that they wanted some people's representatives and some documents. The reason was that when we were in India, we had to go all over to see high ranking officials to complain. So without any people's representative, it was not appropriate. The three officials (kungö) needed some support so that it would not just be action taken by only 3 people but was action backed by documents and by the people's representatives. So they send a letter and that's how the people's (representatives of the people) came.

Q: Is that the way the 2nd people's association came into being or what?

A: The second people's association had already started in Lhasa. Later, the letter saying that representatives should come to India came through Phala. Phala spoke with us and told us that some people's representatives and documents are needed to go to India. So that's how it finally happened.

Q: However, there were documents when the people's association first started, right?

A: When the people's association first started, there were not many documents. When it first started doing the rituals, those documents were there like the documents regarding doing the rituals. Later, when we opposed the Chinese, from various regions they said that Tibet needs to be independent and so when we demonstrated in Lhasa, we got letters from these various regions. That's how we got these political letters. From the letters that I brought, there were religious letters the regarding the rituals. Later, when we opposed against the Chinese, the letters that we received from the various regions were there also. The petition that we [prepared to] give to the UN was also there.

Q: Now regarding the letter, a letter came from Kalimpong, right? After the letter was received, you did not go and look for the documents, right? You already had the documents, right?

A: No. They did not go to look. When the letter came from Kalimpong the documents were already in our possession. Alo Chöndze had the documents.

Q: When you took the documents to India the people who knew about this were the people in the prison, Andru Gombo Tashi, and Traya Atru Lama, right?

A: There were only 5 people who knew, no one else.

Q: Did Phala Drönyerchemmo know or not?

A: Yes he knew, but from among the people, if the secret would be leaked out, then only the 5 were responsible. Kungö Chemmo [Drönyerchemmo] of course knew everything; that I was leaving with documents, etc. The secret would never be leaked out from Kungö Chemmo, right? So there was no need for me to worry about it. But from among the people, it was different. Even for the earlier people's association, the secret leaked out. So among the people, there were only those 5 who knew this. There were a lot who signed, but they did not know that I was leaving with the documents.

Q: Among the people who signed, who was there?

A: I will tell you what I remember. There was Alo Chöndze. There was also someone who knew some medicine called Amji Anenla, Amdo Legshey, Triu Khamba Getob Targye [Tib. dge stobs], Triu Khamba Chöndze something, an elderly man from Gaba by the name of Gaba Wangtrinla [Tib. sga pa dbang 'phrin lags] or something.

Q: The Gaba was called Wangtrin la?

A: The Gaba person was from Jyekundo [Tib. skye rgu mdo]. Wangtrin was his name. Then there was Tsarongpa Aba, Gyaltang Kharchen [Tib. rgyal thang mkhar chen] Chandzö, Andru Jinda, myself, Markham [Tib. smar khams pa] Gen Gudra [Tib. rgan gur drag] or something and another one. Then there was Shigatse Lhabju, Bumtang Trunyi, Bisu, and Shigatse Karkhang Jola [Tib. bkhar khang jo lags] So there were some 20 odd members who signed. So these were in the documents.

Q: Generally, the documents were looked after by Alo Chöndze. Why did he hand it over to you?

A: They were about to arrest him in the police regiment. We heard the secret that he was going to be arrested tomorrow, the next day or the day after that. So if the documents were found, there would be problems. So before he was arrested, he was able to put the documents in my house.

Q: Now, we are talking about the people's association documents. When we say the people's association documents, what was in this. Were there the seals/oaths [Tib. gan rgya] or what?

A: There were the letters that were sent from various regions with seals. They said that we need to oppose the Chinese and they put their seals on it. There was no such things as signatures.

Q: So they put their name and their seals, right?

A: Yes. The names and the seals and, as I already related, that's how it came from the various regions. Among the documents there were a lot relating to the rituals that we performed. These also stated that we have to oppose the Chinese and that we are united.

Q: Yesterday, I asked you about Phala Drönyerchemmo and a few of those who were working under him; some of the trusted people like Depön Tashi Berela and you know the Tseja.

A: I don't know the name of the Tseja, but he had some problem with his eyes. We used to be very happy because it was said that this Kungö was really brave. Then there was a tsendrön who was the monk official from the [monk's household] of the third rank ex-commander-in-chief, Magji Dzasa [Tib. dmag spyi dza sag] [note: his name was Kelsang Ngawang [Tib. skal bzang ngag dbang] and the Magji Dzasa's name is Keltsüla [Tib. skal tshul lags]. It seems that his ancestry was Khamba. He was there. It is said that he was absolutely brave, one who puts his life on the line. Kungö Namseling was also there.

Q: Did they make a pledge to start an association or what?

A: Probably, among the government officials they might have had a kind of organization that was composed of trustworthy people who would not leak out the secret, but I can't say anything clearly about this.

Q: So did you have contact with them?

A: No, not much.

Q: Delivering letters?

A: This was all done through Phala. There was no connection with them.

Q: Now suppose you brought a letter from Kalimpong, did you go to straight to Norbulinga and deliver it to Phala?

A: One could also deliver it at his residence. So in this way we didn't have to go all the way to Norbulinga. Later, when letters had to be sent from Lhasa to Jenkhentsisum, if I was going, I would tell them that I am leaving [for India] and so they would send it through me.

Q: So did you take such letters?

A: When we traders went, they would send stuff, right? I would not know what was in the letters, right? I would take the letters when I used to go to India about twice a year to trade.

Q: Before you left for India you went to see Phala, right? What did you say to him?

A: Just that. Phala knows that I am the one who is going to go, right? So before I was going [with the document], sort of like an introduction, I would tell him that I was leaving tomorrow. Then the next day I went to see Phala early in the morning.

Q: Where? At his house?

A: At Norbulinga. Previous to that I did not ask Phala anything. We spoke for a long time. I drank about 4 or 5 cups and we spoke. Phala said that you guys doing these things is very good. But regarding these things you have to be very careful. If word leaks out and the documents loose their secrecy [it would be bad]. So he advised me a lot. So I told Phala that I would make sure everything was done carefully.

Q: When you went to see him where was this place?

A: At Norbulinga?

Q: Where in Norbulinga?

A: His house was there.

Q: His house, I see.

A: Yes. Since he was the Drönyerchemmo, he had large quarters.

Q: So it was not at the Norbulinga Gaa [the Secretariat], right?

A: No, not at the Gaa.

Q: You said something on the tape that I did not understand. There were 3 people who were arrested, right? There was some talk that the Chinese were going to take them out. Then it was said that we need some volunteers and then after that Andru Jinda became very trusting of you or something. Now I didn't understand that.

A: It was like this. The 3 were put in [Tibetan] prison, right? Probably, it was said that the Chinese were going to take over their incarceration. There may have been such talk.

Q: I see, they were in prison and so they were going to take them out.

A: The Chinese were going to take them out. There was such talk. So Andru Jinda [Gombo Tashi] heard about this and he came and we had that talk. He said, "It seems that the Chinese are going to take Alo Chöndze out of prison. If they do that then we the people cannot tolerate this. We will not easily allow himself to be handed over." I said that this is not likely. He said that this is definitely being said. So I replied that if this is the case, then there is nothing else to be done. The two of us don't have any trusted servants to send so when the time comes, just pass the word along and I myself will come. So whatever may happen, we will not let that happen so easily. So Jinda was very happy with me and so he trusted me.

Q: So you were saying that whatever needs to be done at that time, you will do it, right?

A: Yes. I said I won't send a servant. I can't trust them. I myself will come. That's what I told Gombo Tashi. So if the Chinese were going to take possession of him, then we will not let that happen so easily.

Q: That means even if you have to fight, you will, right?

A: That's it! If the Chinese take possession then our people will have difficulties, right? There would be bloodshed. We will lose the fight as there is no hope of winning, right? The Chinese have such large numbers, right? However, we will gain great publicity. But later, whether it was just rumors or what, it did not take place. Anyway that was the case.

Q: It is said that in the 1950's the Kashag did not know about the Drönyerchemmo's group. Others say that the Kashag knew, but they were not saying anything and that it was not possible that the Kashag did not know. Still others say that the Kashag cannot easily meet because the moment they met, the Chinese knew everything right away. So during this time, what was the situation. Did the Kashag know about the Drönyerchemmo's work or what?

A: No, they didn't know.

Q: Did the Kashag tell the Drönyerchemmo to do this work or to do that work?

A: Oh! No way. People did not have belief in the Kashag. At that time, Ngabö was running after the Chinese like hell, right? Nobody liked Surkhang at that time. At that time, Surkhang was cunning, but later he did become tough [Tib. mkregs po]. At first, he was very cunning and in the Kashag there was just no way that the secret work of the Drönyerchemmo would be known. The Drönyerchemmo himself made the decisions. Whether Kungö Lukhang and the Sitsab Lama knew that, we don't know, right? But the Kashag, no way.

Q: No?

A: No. If the Kashag knew that, then they could not keep the secret from the Chinese and the Chinese would have made it very difficult. At that time, there were a lot of talks that Surkhang was being "two-faced".

Q: Was there such talk?

A: Yes. But much, much later, after Tibet was almost lost, then it was said that he became very tough. He was very much against the Chinese. It is said that the Chinese were saying that they were going to cut him into pieces and kill him. And he told them to do whatever they want since I'm alone and you have the power and the people. I heard that he said this strong talk and so this is something we welcomed, isn't it? But at first, there was talk that he was cunning. Ngabö was a person who wouldn't say these things at all. When we had meetings in Delhi and when we went to demonstrate, Ngabö would not say even a word.

Q: He wouldn't?

A: No, he wouldn't. Surkhang would say things, but not Ngabö. At that time, there was Ngabö, Surkhang and Shatra. No. no. not Shatra. What's [his name]?

Q: Ragashag.

A: Ragashag. So those were the ones who came from Tibet. Then there was Jenkhentsisum, and we the people met them at Delhi. We said that we cannot allow the Dalai Lama to return. Ngabö did not say a word.

Q: He didn't talk?

A: No. He himself might have been feeling a kind of guilt [Tib. skyag gnong], right? He stood on the side of the Chinese and the people did not have faith in him, right?

Q: At Delhi, did the people and all meet where the Kashag was?

A: We went to where the Kashag was.

Q: Where the Kashag was?

A: Yes. What I was saying now is that we went to where Ngabö, Surkhang and Ragashag were. At that time, the Drönyerchemmo was also there.

Q: This was at Delhi?

A: Yes, at Delhi. The Dalai Lama was there and so was everyone. So at that time, we approached the Kashag. There were quite a lot of our people's (association members). Alo Chöndze was there, Jayan Dawa, the Ganden monk, and I were there, Shelkar Chandzö, Baba Legshey, Champa Wangdü, Champa Tsündrö, [Gyantse] Pejö [the latter 3 were the runaway monk officials from Tibet] and Jenkhentsisum. So there were around 10 of us.

Q: Were the Dedön Tshogpa people like Lhalungpa there?

A: No, he was not.

Q: So you people went to the Kashag and what were you saying?

A: We were telling them not to take the Dalai Lama back; that we want him to stay. Whatever work has to be done it should concern his staying. We know what the Chinese are like. All they ever did was tell us lies.

Q: And so what did they say?

A: Surkhang was being very diplomatic [Tib. mkhas po] and said that we are going to do whatever we can. Surkhang is the one who replied. Ragashag may have said a word or two, but Ngabö did not say a word.

Q: I don't know about Surkhang and Ragashag, but what I heard was that Ngabö said that if you are going to stay outside, then who is going to help you. And if you have good help, then please show me.

A: This he did not say when we were there. He wouldn't even be able to say that. I don't know if he told that to Jenkhentsisum.

Q: So you made this petition to the Kashag. How many times did you do that?

A: Delhi was the only place where we were able to get together, though we did meet them all over at various places. We went to Bombay, Calcutta and to all the various places that the Dalai Lama went, and we tried to ask them whenever we could. But we never got the opportunity. Finally, we got the opportunity at Delhi.

Q: So Delhi was the only place

A: Yes.

Q: Later at Kalimpong, were there not meetings with the Kashag?

A: No.

Q: When Alo Chöndze was arrested, the Chinese must have said something to the Kashag that he should be arrested. The Chinese were saying that they were going to arrest him, right? And so the government went through the motions of arresting the three. Later, what did the Kashag tell Alo Chöndze and those people.

A: Nothing really. They must have said something kind of nice sounding [Tib. rdzig po] talk, but otherwise nothing. They [Chinese] said that they were aggravating [Tib. dkrog rkyen bzo] the situation. So the Kashag didn't have any choice but to say something like that, right?

Q: Did they say that according to custom, there was no such thing as the people's (association). So why did you do that?

A: No. They were saying that they were aggravating the situation. So this is what the Kashag would say and they would have to say something like that, right?

Q: During the Mönlam, you took one load of letters, right? These were printed in Kalimpong, right? Now when they were printed at Kalimpong where did you collect them from?

A: From Shakabpa himself.

Q: From Shakabpa's house?

A: Yes, there was a small printing machine and they were printing from there. Later, they were packed into loads. Since I was a trader and I had to send many loads, I sent it along with those loads.

Q: After you sent the loads, they arrived at Lhasa and from Lhasa where did you take them?

A: First, I would get the loads dropped at my house and gradually I took them to Norbulinga.

Q: I see. In Norbulinga to Phala's house?

A: Yes. Nobody paid attention to the loads being taken from Lhasa to Norbulinga.

Q: So you took it to Phala's house itself?

A: Yes. To his house. Otherwise we couldn't trust anyone, right?

Q: From his house then he decided how to drop it at the Mönlam.

A: Yes. It was his plan. Whoever he ordered.

Q: I think I asked you that before, but there were 3 monk officials that came; Gyantse Pejö, Champa Tsündrö, Champa Wangdü. Did they voluntarily come or did Phala send them?

A: They volunteered on their own.

Q: Last time, in the Dedön Tshogpa, you mentioned Dathang. Jenkhentsisum of course was there, right?

A: Then Tando [Tib. dar mdo] Rimpoche and Phünkang Seykusho [Tib. sras sku zhabs] and his wife, Lhajam. Both were there.

Q: Then you said there was a Ganden monk.

A: He was a Ganden representative. He was a Ganden Jangtsa [Tib. byang rtse] monk, a "people's" representative.

Q: Then you said that there was a monk. Its probably the same Ganden monk. Then Jayan Dawa.

A: Then our Shelkar Chandzö.

Q: Was Lhalungpa in it?

A: Yes, he was in it.

Q: Altogether, how many of them were there?

A: When we meet, there were about 10 odd people. Some were not always present, right?

Q: Generally, the meeting took place at Shakabpa's house, right?

A: Yes, in Shakabpa house. Later there were one or two meetings in Ganden Villa. Mainly it was at Shakabpa house.

Q: Do you remember what you met regarding?

A: Regarding how best we should be work against the Chinese. That we have to go and meet the Indian Party members. That's about it. There wasn't anything else except how best to organize and approach our policy against the Chinese. We met, but generally it was just what the kungö [Jenkhentsisum] said because they had planned well, isn't it? If they went to Delhi the kungö had already met the Indian Parties and have made some announcements or publicity [Tib. khyab bgrags]

Q: For example, there was the Gyantse flood. At that time, were there any meetings about collecting contributions, etc?

A: No. We were not a part of that. We didn't do anything except [discuss] how to organize to oppose against the Chinese.

Q: Suppose if they had to do some secret work, then who would do it?

A: Mainly the 3 of them would do it. Then there would be things that they would tell us and things they didn't have to right? Mainly, it was the three of them. That is why they and Phünkang Lhajam did not get along. Phünkang Lhajam wanted to know about all these things and the kungö would not show her.

Q: Why did she want to see. What did she want to know?

A: Phünkang Lhajam was educated and tough and it would be beneficial for her own contacts and things like that [if she knew what they were doing]. She tried to use Alo Chöndze and tried hard to make contacts directly. But she was unable. There was Alo Chöndze, Phünkang, Yuthok, and Kungö Drunyichemmo. They didn't get along with us and they tried to do something separate, but they did not last.